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Harmless Moments in Peace-Keeping: The Politics of Telling Stories That Do Not Fit into Critical Security Studies Narratives

I offer a fractured narrative of a funny, certainly harmless, but most importantly non-dramatic moment of interaction with KFOR, EULEX and Serb monks and myself in the midst of doing fieldwork in Kosovo. The open ended narrative operates as a practice of representing the complexity of how the many stories of the self are enacted, come alive and are transformed in research encounters in line with postmodern qualitative inquiry. The paper proposes openhearted curiosity and moment to moment awareness as an antidote to the habitual use of concepts, which can lead to reiterating the line of demarcation between the relevant and irrelevant, the dramatic and non-dramatic, and which recognizes this as an active use of power. I ask what is at stake when we exclude non-dramatic and funny moments from the wider empirical material in the hopes of doing serious feminist and critical security studies research and discuss how the habitual use of concepts may contribute to this. The paper argues for broadening the scope of critical security studies to include social interactions in the midst of peace-keeping operations that do not fit easily into the stories we tell about peace-keeping.

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Keywords: concepts; methodology; feminism; security studies; gender; peace-keeping;

It was funny all along. First, we had trouble getting a taxi. Or rather, he had trouble choosing a taxi that he could trust. He had a system for it, which I have now forgotten. It had to do with the potential affiliation of the taxi drivers with local organized crime and also something else. He was in charge of the safety of the civilian crisis management staff and I saw his process of selection as part of him doing his job, even though I was a visiting researcher travelling on my own accord with the help of local contacts. I did not interfere in his process. After all, he had gone through so much trouble to get us permission to visit the Monastery of the Holy Archangels just outside Prizren in southern Kosovo. The monastery was guarded by the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and was lined with barbed wire fence. No one without KFOR's permission and the approval of the monastery's brothers would be allowed inside. And the officer of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), who was now checking out the cabs, had ensured us that there had been enough time for his request to go through the chain of command. Everything was supposed to be in order and I was excited to see the site and meet the brothers of the Holy Archangels. I had been instructed not to bring up politics, EULEX, President Ahtisaari¹ or even the March riots in 2004,² during which the monastery had been burned and the KFOR had evacuated the monks against their will. So, understandably, I was feeling a bit anxious and curious about how it would all turn out, but I did not have much time to ruminate over this as things would take on a life of their own.³

In this paper, I present a fractured narrative (Henson 2011), in line with the postmodern qualitative approach (Richardson 1997; Denzin and Lincoln 1998), of a funny, certainly harmless, but most importantly, non-dramatic moment in the midst of doing fieldwork in Kosovo in October 2008, where I was researching the incorporation (or the lack) of gender-mainstreaming in the European Union Rule of Law mission in Kosovo.⁴ I emphasize here the notion of the non-dramatic because such

moments may not catch our attention as containing relevant or problematic enough material for analytical inquiry in critical security studies. As Stephen Chan (2011) has argued, research on war tends to focus on spectacular violence at the cost of paying less attention to how people live their lives in the midst of violent conflict and its aftermath. This paper builds on the idea that there is more to war than suffering (Barkawi and Brighton 2011) and emphasizes the relevance of recognizing how non-dramatic moments in the midst of fieldwork research can be meaningful for developing a further understanding of the experience of war in critical security studies. I situate this story in the stream of recent research which actively broadens the perspective on war as an experience (Sylvester 2011a, 2013. Research of war as an experience (Parashar 2011; MacKenzie 2011; Penttinen 2013) explores how war is entangled at the level of intimate and interpersonal relationships and seeks to tease out experiences, situations and events that exceed dominant narratives and the predominant understanding of the power relations. The narrative format enables to the researcher to capture the sense of the international (Puumala 2017), inviting readers to participate in the meaning making in ways that challenge the power relations between the author and the audience.

Writing research in a narrative form serves the purpose of attending to research as a relationship (Ceglowski 2002) and representing this in a style that opens the way for interactions and relationships to contribute to what we can know. The postmodern qualitative approach reminds us that researcher is not an all-knowing subject and emphasizes how research relationships prompts a sense of self in relation to others, including the reader. An open ended narrative enables the readers to discern the power relations, disruption and resistances in what is said, who speaks and how speaking turns are taken and to find what the meaning of the story is in broader ways than logico-scientific writing style can do (Richardson 1997).

The narrative presented in this paper on the communication and miscommunication between the different characters in the story is also intended as a metaphor for critical security studies on how our own presumptions and habits of mind can bind us to our preconceived notions of who we are and what the discipline requires. As the story of the research encounter unfolds, the many stories of the self come alive, collide and dissolve in the process and opens a moment of connection in a most unexpected way. It is this openness to pluripotency and aliveness that is my proposition of a way to ease up on the norm of adopting a dystopian world-view, which is reiterated in security studies (see also Van Rythoven 2014) and the habitual use of concepts which follows from this.

What brought me to Kosovo was my curiosity concerning how female police officers, in particular, felt about the expectations placed on them on the basis of their gender and how they assessed the ways they could integrate the gender perspective into the context of the particular mission. That year, Finland had published its first UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan (NAP),⁵ following the lead of other Nordic countries, and there was a motivation to increase the share of women and to integrate the gender perspective as a means to enhance operational effectiveness (Valenius 2007; Penttinen 2012; Lackenbauer and Langlais 2013).⁶ Therefore, in Kosovo my main goal was to talk to women about the relevance of their gender in the everyday practices of crisis management—in short, to do core feminist security studies research (Wibben 2011, 2016). I also did interviews with Finnish male officers in order to gain insight into their views on the relevance of gender and on the hope and expectations placed on the presence of more women in the missions.

As the Nordic police officers formed a close and hospitable network, I was invited to diverse recreational field trips to historical places in Kosovo, to war monuments and to dinners and social occasions. The trip to the monastery was one such occasion, which came purely out of the hospitality and generosity of one male EULEX officer, who thought it would be a great idea for us

to see something other than the EULEX barracks and the KFOR camp. I was looking forward to the trip to the monastery, as it is often possible during such daylong events to interact with officers at a different level than in a formal interview setting, often done in their office at their workplace.

“It is better for us not to take the mission car, for it could potentially upset the brothers. They will not let us in if they know I work for EULEX; I will not wear my uniform and we will take a taxi.”

The EULEX officer confirms that he knows what he is talking about. After all, the new EULEX-monitored independence of Kosovo is an abomination to the Serbs and especially to the brothers of Holy Archangels, as this place is the most important site for the Serbs, the reason why they do not want to let go of Kosovo. “Remember not to bring up EULEX. Do not talk about politics and remember, if the brothers start talking about politics, don’t believe them, the visit is purely for cultural reasons,” he reminds me.

And yet there we are, stuck just outside Prizren, frustrated as the taxi driver refuses to drive us any further. We try numerous different ways to explain to him that we are just going to the monastery close by and not to the next town, but it is no use since he does not understand us. He is getting frustrated with us, too, and he makes it very clear that the ride stops there.

After some time of us trying to convince the taxi driver that he can just drive us a little bit further and of him arguing that he is not going to take us to the next town, he gets the idea to call a fellow taxi driver, a friend of his, who understands English better so that we can communicate. Soon the EULEX officer is talking on the taxi radio and explaining the situation and we hear the fellow taxi driver’s

voice as he explains in Albanian to our driver the real destination where we are headed. It turns out that driving to the monastery is not a problem at all, so our driver starts the car and our journey continues.

In line with Enloe's (2004) feminist curiosity, I call for open-hearted present moment awareness as an approach that could enable a broadening our perspective and enable us to recognize the complexity of the world and the relations we study. The EULEX Officer had a system for selecting the correct taxi based on his security expertise, loyalty to mission politics and knowledge about the region. In practice this did not help much, as the one thing the officer was not taking into account was the taxi drivers' interpretation of us and his personal boundaries as to where he was willing to go. It was easy to see how the presumptions about the other prevented communication between the two and turned into friction (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013). But would it be possible to bring awareness of how researchers' own assumptions and expectations guide perceptions during the practice of conducting research?

Dauphinée (2010) writes in a slightly different context about her epiphany as to what counts as relevant in the practice of knowledge production in the context of war and conflict. She describes her process of disillusionment when she realized that what she had studied in IR could not grasp the complexity of the war in Bosnia and how books on Bosnia did not provide a sense of the reality that she encountered in the field. For her, this realization lead to her writing her disillusionment into the academic text, as she could not go back to believing that the IR theories were representations of reality. She does not reveal what made her believe that theory or books could represent reality, but as

a solution she proposes autoethnography as a means to represent how researchers' experiences are meaningful in the production of knowledge.

Enloe's practice of curiosity is done with the intention of paying attention to the kinds of experiences, evidence and events we exclude from research and to why we do so. For Enloe the interest lies in women's lives and experiences, which are often deemed to be irrelevant, to not be serious or worthy of attention. With respect to critical security studies, I want to bring awareness to how that which is regarded as relevant often builds on the presumption of the importance of studying what is wrong in peace-keeping. For example, as there is a debate concerning inefficiency and corruption (e.g., Paris 2003; Lipson 2007), sexual abuse and exploitation (e.g., Higate and Henry 2004; Carreiras 2010; Higate 2007; Whitworth 2007) or challenges in integrating a gender perspective and human rights into the mission, we may let go of being open and curious about the complexity of long-term effects and multiple subjectivities (Sylvester 1993) that international missions create and narrow our focus on the problems already laid out for us.

I do not propose autoethnography in the way Dauphinée does as the solution to the discrepancy between expectations and the field. Rather, I wish to take this step of self-reflectivity even further to open-hearted curiosity towards how our own beliefs and values impact how we interact with others and how these preconceived notions may limit our capacity as researchers to be open to the fullness of life experiences. Coming back to the moment with the taxi driver stopping just outside of Prizren exemplifies how the systematic planning, evaluation and preparation of the EULEX officer did not help in reaching the destination. These presumptions had to be undone before the ride could continue.

The practice of curiosity begins with the recognition of the ontological relationality and vulnerability of our being as something which does not precede social interaction (Salamon 2010) and it is a mode

of inquiry on how relationships gives rise to a sense of self at the moment of the social interaction. Autoethnography on the other hand is defined as a practice of researching the self in relation to others (Boylon and Orbe 2014). This inquiry begins with the presumption of a researcher's self as a situated subjectivity embodying the intersections of gender, race, culture, and privilege in relation to others who are similarly or differentially situated. The object of attention is the interaction of pre-given subjects. Recognizing ontological relationality means embracing an understanding of human subjectivity as being always already dynamic, constantly evolving, and hence open to contact (Salamon 2010).

The object of attention is opened to what arises in the present moment instead of viewing individuals interacting with fixed and pre-determined identities coming into contact and colliding with each other. Attending to the present moment opens a line on which to meet the other (Kaufman 2011b). Paying attention to these moments opens the possibility of taking notice of how individuals marked by a particular axis of oppression might not identify with or enact the identity politics or positionality by which their social situatedness is marked (Bost 2010).

We arrive at the gate and one of the KFOR officers is there to meet us, smiling, obviously happy that they are receiving visitors. The first thing he says is, "Why didn't you take your own EULEX car? You could have parked it right here inside the fence. We have plenty of space here."

It is a nice warm October day. I find myself surprised by the open-hearted and warm welcome by the officers. We look around and the KFOR officer points to the KFOR station at the top of the mountain. There is a watchtower. He says, "I thought, if you would like to, we could hike up the mountain. It is

a nice walk.” How nice it would be to go hiking, which would mean that we would be able to spend the whole day there. But, I am not prepared. I am wearing black boots with high heels, and a smart casual silk dress, with the intention of indicating femininity and professionalism. After all, we are here for a purely cultural visit to see the historic site and not to spend the day with KFOR.

I want to convince him that I could walk up anyway. Who cares if I ruin my shoes? The experience is what matters. But I don’t.

I say something along the lines of hiking taking too much time.

He continues, “We stay here to protect the monks. This is our only reason for being here. If something would happen to them, it would be very bad for us.”

In this section I address how telling the story of a funny moment challenges implicit practices in knowledge production. I divide these into three overlapping themes. First, the purpose of introducing such a moment as a relevant story and object of inquiry is to bring attention to what happens when we use the same concepts time and again. Kaufman (2011a) uses the metaphor of the cookie cutter to explain how the use of concepts operates as means to cut and extract a piece from the wider empirical material, similar to how a cookie cutter is used on rolled-out dough. The edges of the concept determine the shape and size of the cut we take for further analysis and what is left to be discarded. The rest of the material is still there; we just decide not to use it. The trouble is that when we use the same concepts over and over again we lose sight of the discarded material and the extracted material becomes representative of the whole material (Kaufman 2011a, 2011b)—or it is representative of the

most relevant stories to tell. This is not to say that the concepts commonly used are wrong or inappropriate. Concepts such as hypermasculinity, hegemonic masculinity or sexualized violence, which are used to analyse the way gender matters in the context of peace-keeping are not irrelevant or inappropriate concepts. The trouble is that when these concepts are reiterated over and over again, it seems that militarized masculinity is what is there to know about men in peace-keeping, or the harm peace-keepers cause is more pertinent to our attention than those moments in which nothing all that dramatic happens. The postmodern qualitative approach is a practice of taking the discarded materials, pieces of interviews or field data, which did not fit into the first round of analysis and being open to what these materials can tell us about the topic we are studying.

Second, regarding specific concepts pertinent to critical and feminist security studies, reiterating the same concepts may turn into a habit or arise out of habit as we submit to what is expected from us in academic contexts. In critical scholarship, the objective is to point out the discrepancy between policy and practice and the multiple (in)securities created by the state-centric or mainstream International Relations (IR) conceptualization of security. Sedgwick (1997) refers to this as a practice of paranoid reading, referring to the tendency to approach materials with the objective to always look for power/knowledge configurations. The problem is when the same process is applied over and over again so much so that the paranoid reading becomes a norm and not a creative critical practice, which could also open the space for, what Sedgwick calls, reparative reading.

Third, the line between relevant and irrelevant follows the same logic of hierarchic binaries between rational-irrational, public-private and masculine-feminine, which form the basis of the gender order (Peterson 2003; Bakker and Silvey 2008). We can discern the implicit and often invisible masculinism in what is considered valuable by paying attention to what kinds of qualities are devalued. These qualities are often associated with the feminine, such as emotion, irrationality,

private, empathy and care. Enloe (2013) argues that the things we dismiss are not only seen as feminine but as juvenile, shallow, silly and trivial. For Enloe, it is often women's experiences and contributions that are dismissed as insignificant, and thus not only are women and their actions seen as secondary to men and men's actions, but they are actually denigrated to the level of children. This, indeed, is a careful and active use of power. The researcher also uses power, perhaps informed by the implicit masculinism of academia, in making the distinction between what matters and what is trivial, because following the norm enables one to be heard and be taken seriously.

As Enloe argues, "to be taken seriously means to be listened to, to be carefully responded to, to have one's ideas and actions thoughtfully weighed. It means that what one does or thinks *matters*" (2013) 5; italics in original). What we choose as meaningful material to be extracted may follow this similar logic. Perhaps a focus on positive emotions and expressions of kindness, such as in the interaction above, may seem to be frivolous or at least of secondary importance to the insecurity, exploitation and oppression that is also apparent at the same time. Or perhaps we downplay how research relationships made it possible to gain the data in order to keep up the appearance that the researcher is in control of their research (Sylvester 2011b). An alternative would be developing an understanding how emotions and senses constitute and contribute to what we know and the relationships we form while conducting research (Puumala 2017) and how these impact what we *feel* to be relevant (Hast 2014). Emotions are not something that hinders the clarity of the (Cartesian) mind, but a way of making sense in deeply intimate ways. Similarly, acknowledging relationships as relevant to what we can know does not take away from the academic expertise of the researcher, but rather points towards the responsibility of researcher in how they interact and communicate with others and how they choose to represent their research findings (Penttinen 2013).

They take our passports and give us visitors' badges. We walk past the main building and toward the ruins as the German officer goes inside to inform the monks that we are here.

But what happens next surprises everyone. There is no document requesting permission to visit. The brothers had no idea that we would be coming and are utterly surprised that a group of Finnish people are standing at the gate. Now I have to be on cue and say the right thing about our curiosity concerning this cultural site. But even this does not matter. After the formalities, the brother welcomes us in and with a serious demeanour he tells us he is happy that we are there. "We don't get visitors very often" he says, "It is a shame that not many people come to visit us."

So here we are inside the gates, finally. This is the place of Serbian history, the monk says, and he takes us to the grounds of the ancient monastery. The KFOR officer seems apologetic. He whispers to me, "I know the history of the place just as well. I could have told you the story. I know it—I know everything—but for some reason the brother wants to be the one to share it." He had planned to give us the guided tour of the ruins, but the monk takes over.

For me, it is just as well. I understand the privilege of visiting this site, especially as women are not usually allowed at all. The brother speaks English well and instructs us walk toward the old walls. The KFOR officer takes a step back and walks behind us. A younger KFOR soldier follows us. He is asked to take pictures.

"Something to remember you by," says the KFOR officer smiling.

The grass is soft, and I feel my heels sinking. The sound of cow bells gets my attention. I look and see the cows walking, high up, high up. It is a misty October day, and the air is soft. I breathe in the mountain air.

I ask the German officer walking with me: "Do you ever get tired of this view?"

"No," he says, "We are very happy here. We stay down here; there is another group watching out for the monastery on the top of the mountain. They stay there for 48 hours and we stay here for another 48 hours. Then we switch."

This is the way it has been for over four years.

The young officer is still taking pictures. I wonder how he feels about all of this. Did he come to Kosovo for an adventure and engage in some action? Only to find himself watching over and guarding a monastery. My local contact said, the only threats to the monastery are drunken teenagers and possible vandalism. But the young KFOR officer maintains his distance. And I do not approach him.

The use of the feminist cookie cutter in security studies extracts materials from peace-keeping and crisis management which show how gender and sexuality inform violent practices in the field of crisis management and in military interventions. For example, recent research, which is informed by the critical study of men and masculinities in the context of peace-keeping and peace-building (DeGroot 2007; Duncanson 2009; Higate 2012) has investigated how militarized masculinities are enacted and

reiterated in the field through aggressive masculinity, practices of self-discipline, homosociality combined with homophobia. Attention to hazing practices within the military and private security companies shows how homoerotic practices can be used for male bonding and the assertion of one's heterosexuality (Belkin 2012), as well as against the feminization and disrespect for personal boundaries and the religion of the locals in Afghanistan (Higate 2012). It is argued that in order for the militarized masculinity to be embodied, it requires the construction and reiteration of masculinity against the feminine or feminized other (Higate and Henry 2004). Moreover, violent practices within the military reveal the sexist and racist ideology within the mission culture (Whitworth 2007).

As already mentioned, these are appropriate and useful concepts, as they enable us to think critically and look past the official discourses on peace-keeping. However, the risk is when the use of specific concepts leads to generalizations of men in peace-keeping mostly or only embodying and enacting destructive forms of masculinity—or to make the assumption that militarized masculinity is a property of a person which determines identity and a person's orientation towards others. The risk exists because what is left out are those moments in which these same men in the military may act with compassion towards each other or when individual security agents are able to provide security even within a sexist, racist and bureaucratic organization (Penttinen 2012). The example of the KFOR and the monks illustrates how the failure to secure the site and protect the monks efficiently during the March riots resulted in a long-term relationship and co-habitation, even after the imminent threat was over, which allowed the KFOR officers to create mutual respect and bonds of friendship and with Serb monks.

I propose the use of the concept of militarized masculinities in a way that allows for multiple subjectivities (Sylvester 1993, 2002) in the way in which we are accustomed to in feminist research on women? In deconstructing gender essentialism about women, it has been important to maintain

how individuals gendered as women may take on different identities and roles at different times (Enloe 2010). This approach would allow us to recognize how gendered subjectivity can be fluid and open to contact. Men in the military may enact hypermasculinity in relations to others at times, but not all the time. The challenge is to recognize that the enactment and embodiment of masculinity in the context of war is complex and to take the more benign and non-dramatic expressions of masculinity as relevant for critical study. Could we be open to stories and storylines of men in peacekeeping which display other forms of masculinity than the sexist, racist ones, just as we have done with the narratives of women and peace?

Here, at this line of demarcation between serious and funny, meaningful and meaningless, I discovered my own unease with taking seriously the moment of empathy, compassion and humour with the KFOR officers and monks. But wouldn't that make me exactly like the EULEX officer whose fixed ideas and beliefs almost prevented us from ever reaching the monastery and whose detailed plan for securing our visit proved to be unnecessary after all⁷?

Paying attention to tiny, seemingly irrelevant moments and writing them into a narrative of critical security studies is a political act. It goes against the grain of habitually using concepts which keeps us extracting materials that point to the violence perpetrated by those who are supposed to protect others. This act of telling a story of a harmless moment is not to make a generalization that peace-keeping is now harmless in general, that all (male) peace-keepers are good, genuinely kind and generous or that moments of friendliness defy moments of exploitation and harm. Rather, it is intended to broaden the possibilities and widen the range of relevant experiences to be accounted for in the study of gendered and ethnicized subjectivities in and of peace-keeping. The significance lies not so much in unexpected events that surprise or catch us off guard, but how the events and subjectivities are entangled with the stories we tell and with what we believe to be true and possible

about ourselves and others. The premise of narrative identity (Wibben 2011) or our lives as storied (Lewis 2011, Whitebrook 2001) comes alive in this encounter and also directs how the visit is about to unfold.

We get a history lesson and I learn the names behind the faces of the marble reliefs. I pay attention to tombstones, and the part of the stone wall. I focus on the medieval art and architecture and try to sense and feel the site—the life that has been lived here—and try to think of something intelligent to say. But the Serb monk guiding us takes care of the talking, and I notice he does not expect to be interrupted. The marble used for the original monastery has been shifted to the mosque in the centre of Prizren and back, depending on the power relations. These are things that happened centuries ago.

At this moment now, there is a sense of serenity, peace and harmony. I can sense the pride and the appreciation of the KFOR officer, of the place and for the brotherhood of Holy Archangels.

I am told that the German officers considered themselves lucky to be stationed here instead of at the military camp. It is so beautiful here, the air is fresh (especially in comparison to Pristina) and one can always go hiking. This story reminds me of the stories of German soldiers stationed in Lapland during the Second World War and how they, too, appreciated the wilderness and possibilities for hunting and fishing. One could have stayed in Lapland for four years and never fired a gun (Wendisch 2006).

“For us, the Ahtisaari Plan was a disaster.” The brother interrupts my thoughts.

And I am all ears again.

The walk around the ruins seems to be over. “They would like to invite you inside the monastery,” the KFOR officer instructs us. This does not happen very often. This never happens! But there is a guest room, in which women are also allowed to enter. So we can say yes to the invitation and we are asked to be very discreet. It is possible because we use the outdoor balcony to access the guestroom and do not have to enter the building. I feel excited and a little bit nervous; I do not want to offend anyone by my presence. And yet I try to get a glimpse of the life inside the monastery, but not too obviously. Some brothers walk past us and greet us cheerfully. At least they are not disturbed by our presence.

We are shown inside a room with a bench around the wall, a table in the middle and chairs. The room is awfully small and the German officers are really tall. They are trying to find a way to sit, to find room for their legs under the table. It is obviously difficult, but I try not to notice. We begin to make conversation. “The cooperation with the monks is going very well. They like us and we get along with them very well, one of the Officers says.”

More KFOR members and more brothers enter the room and sit down. Soon, from a side door—one that I had not noticed—the brother who guided us enters the room with a tray of small cups with Rakia. He jokes, “Have you had your medicine today? Now is a good time for it. And what do Finnish people drink as medicine?”

“I guess Vodka is popular,” I find myself answering, although I think to myself that the Finns don’t drink it as medicine, they just drink. “In Finland we need a lot of medicine,” I say. And everybody laughs.

The brothers joke around with each other about what they know about Finland. One says, “I know the Finnish ski jumper—remember him? What was his name?” The other one answers, “His name is Matti Nykänen, wasn’t it? Do you know him?” Yes of course, I know who Matti Nykänen is, but I am puzzled. Here at the most historic and precious site, I find myself in a situation where Serb monks are asking about a Finnish ski jumper, who indeed had his winning streak in the Olympics and world championships way back in the early 1980s, and who pursued another career as a pop singer and strip-tease performer during the post-Cold War recession in Finland—a person who currently is mostly represented as a degenerate alcoholic and who is notoriously well known for abusing his wife, for which he was recently imprisoned. But, the Serb monks also know about this not-so-glorious present and continue to joke around about how Matti Nykänen should not have taken so much medicine when he was younger and should have learned his limits early on. Otherwise, he would not have ended up in such bad shape. And there is laughter again.

Another one remembers something else about Finland: the rock band Lordi, who rose to European fame in 2006 by winning the Eurovision Song Contest with the song “Hard Rock Hallelujah.” The band is famous for their monster and zombie outfits and for never appearing in public without them. In Finland, there has been concern among conservatives about whether the costumes and songs of the band represent a satanic cult. One of the monks tries to sing the tune of the song and everybody is amused.

During this meeting, the March Riots appear through slight hints. After all, the March Riots are in one way the beginning of the turn of the events that brought us all here at this moment. And even so, it is not on the part of the brothers of the Holy Archangels, who want to reminisce about that night when they had to leave, but the German officers instead, for whom not being able to protect these

men “was very bad” as they had had to give in, evacuate the monks and leave the site unprotected. The KFOR presence in Prizren had been outnumbered by over 500 rioters, they say. Yet these comments are dismissed by the brother as he draws my attention back to the present moment, showing me different floor plans of the new, even bigger monastery that they are going to build. The two designs differ quite a bit and we speculate which one would be more functional to live in. He actually listens to my views on how to resolve the problems in each of the plans. We enter into a deep discussion on how to design the plumbing and I almost forget where I am. At the time I was also in the process of building a home and I could relate to his concerns about integrating plumbing so that the interior design of the monastery is not compromised. Who could have guessed that we would find a point of connection over our shared interest in and frustration about how to design perfect plumbing into a new building?

While living this encounter, I saw it as a postmodern moment in post-conflict Kosovo in which subjectivity is something that comes into being through the circulation of stories and through interaction with others. A moment like this exceeds preconceived ideas and coherent identities and enables something that can only happen because of multiple coincidences, misunderstandings and the capacity of participants to be open to what arises in the present moment. It allows for humour and kindness to be the mode of interaction within this group of people, even though what brings them together for a moment in time is embedded in the continuity of war and peace-keeping. The event itself is not in any way an exceptional one and this is important. It is quite common for things to not go as planned regardless of the preparations and measures taken to ensure certainty and to encounter people who are welcoming and kind in foreign countries.

The reason to tell this story is not for a coherent conclusion or a generalization about men and masculinities in the context of post-conflict Kosovo. Rather, my objective has been to draw attention to how our preconceived notions about others and ourselves are exactly those—presumptions and ideas. As such these may be only constructions of the mind, which come undone the minute one's attention is brought to what is in the present moment.

If there is an argument to be found in this piece of writing, it is an appeal to be open to such moments in the midst of conducting research that do not support our beliefs or habitual ways of understanding and making meaning in critical scholarship. In short, my intention is to propose that being mindful to what is can enhance research practice and broaden the concepts we select as useful ones. In other words, it is a matter of being mindful to what is, instead of being attached to practices that have been useful in the past. This is not to say we all need to go and do ethnographic fieldwork, although this approach can be a very effective way to challenge unquestioned assumptions (Ackerly and True 2008) if one is already open and willing to let go of the habitual and accepted use of concepts and other constructions of the mind.

To be open to the present moment means to be able to be present with the intention of befriending the present moment with no goal in mind. Relying on previous experience, such as professionalism in research or tested concepts in political science, is to approach every day with a sense of already knowing what is and this may hinder the capacity to recognize the aliveness that is in the present moment. Therefore the goal of this piece is not to say that mundane moments matter more than dramatic ones, or that we should all be looking for friendliness and compassion in the context of war. But to bring an awareness also of our own presumptions and habitual practices when we make distinctions between relevant and irrelevant materials in the course of conducting research.

Sometimes we need something so out of the ordinary as a Serb monk singing “Hard Rock Hallelujah” to wake us up from the dreamless sleep of habitually using concepts and the practice of paranoid reading. Out of uncertainty and openness comes the possibility of experiencing oneself and others in an open way that provides new ways of being and brings to our senses how each moment is new. There are no ordinary moments.

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¹ Former President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland acted as a UN Special Envoy and presented the proposal for limited independence of the Serb province of Kosovo. The proposal aims for a compromise and the protection of the minority rights of Serbs in Kosovo and is called the Ahtisaari Plan.

² The March Riots refer to attacks by ethnic Albanians against Serbs and Roma population in Kosovo. Prizren was an important site for the rioters who supported the Kosovo Liberation Army. According Human Rights Watch there were an estimated 50,000 rioters that took part in the violence in Kosovo. The protection of civilians was up to the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) and UNMIK officers in the area, who lacked proper equipment. The German KFOR did not take immediate action to protect the local Serbs who were forced out of their homes. The rioters destroyed important Serb Orthodox churches, including the Monastery of the Holy Archangels. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/kosovo0704/7.htm>, accessed 30 May 2016.

³ This story took place during my fieldwork in Kosovo in October 2008.

⁴ The European Union Rule of Law mission in Kosovo (EULEX) was the largest civilian crisis management mission deployed by the EU. The mission has monitoring, mentoring and advising (MMA) objectives and an executive mandate in the process of strengthening Kosovo's judicial system, correction services, police service and customs.

⁵ The National Action Plan is an instrument to implement UNSCR 1325 in foreign policy, especially with regard to peace-keeping, crisis management, peace-building and development policies. Finland published the first Action Plan in 2008.

⁶ I participated in the drafting process of the NAP in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The faith placed on increasing the share of female security agents as a means to improve the operational effectiveness sparked my curiosity to investigate how the female officers saw their own role in the field (Penttinen 2012).

⁷ A curious fact is that, according to one of the reviewers of an earlier draft, I had been given false information about women not being welcome at the monastery.